

Hand of the Trusts Leaves Mark on Eastern States

WOULD FREE ENTRANCE TO A DISTRICT WHERE FARMS ARE
DESERTED AND IN RUINS HELP THE CANADIAN FARMER ?

C. L. Sibley, Montreal, Describes "the Market of Ninety Millions."

It is a wonderful electioneering phrase, that phrase about "the market of ninety millions of people at our doors."

It suggests so much ; it means so little.

Ninety millions of people ! The phrase rolls off the tongue with impressiveness ; it has a grandeur all its own ; it is vaguely suggestive of illimitable horizons for trade and opportunities. A market of ninety millions of people, and at our very doors !

We are a little nation of seven millions of people. We sell all our surplus products in lands beyond the sea. We do a bigger trade per head of population than any other nation in the world.

An Open Door

And now, suddenly, in the midst of the full tide of our prosperity, a wonderful thing has happened. Our statesmen—the very men who were flouted again and again by the representatives of that market of ninety millions of people—have accomplished the impossible. They have pried open the doors to that market. And they have done it, be it observed, not as the result of persistent effort or by a stroke of genius, but by direct invitation of their erstwhile foes in commerce. Through that door our foremost industry, that of farming, may have access, free and untrammelled, to "a market of ninety millions of people."

The Cost of Admission

But before we can go through that door to this wonderful market we have to do an act of courtesy, and the consequences of that act of courtesy we have hitherto almost entirely overlooked. Our farmers are to be allowed free access to the American market ; in return we have to open another door—the door that swings north—and we have to say to our American friends, "Of course, if it should strike any of your farmers, or any of your great food-distributing trusts, at any time that they would like to come through this door to our rapidly-growing market in Canada, they will be at perfect liberty to do so."

What the Show amounts to

If we think out the meaning of this little amenity, we shall get a very different view of this "market of ninety millions of people at our doors," to the one that first suggests itself. We begin to remember that this ninety millions of people by no means constitute a market for outsiders, even with the doors pried open. They are our rivals along every line of industry that we have. And they are farmers themselves, to the extent of fully fifty per cent. ; farmers who not only produce everything that their own nation requires in the way of farm produce but who export their surplus to the world's markets to compete with Canadian products. There is only one market in the world in which Canadian farm produce is protected from United States competition, and that is the splendid and promising market provided by the Dominion itself. Under reciprocity the barriers protecting that market are to be thrown down, and Canadian farmers in their own territory will get the competition of the forty-five million odd farmers who live south of the border line.

P
5012
911?
+23W

An Empty Bubble

It is argued by the advocates of reciprocity that the agricultural resources of the United States are rapidly becoming exhausted; that the United States will soon cease to be an exporting country, and will have to import her food stuffs. Our western farmers are told of the wonderful market for their wheat that the States will offer; our farmers in Ontario and the Eastern provinces are promised a bonanza in the markets of all the great centres of population from Buffalo to New York.

Trusts, Not Farmers, Would Benefit

A careful study of the situation will dispel any such illusion. The facts are that the United States not only produces a huge surplus of agricultural produce, but that the prices of such products average considerably lower than the prices which Canadian farmers get in their home market. Further than that, a large proportion of the price which consumers pay in the United States for their food stuffs goes not into the pockets of the farmers, but into the pockets of the great food distributing trusts, who manipulate the markets at will. They dictate the prices that the farmers receive for their products, and these prices are often so ruinously low—although the price paid by the consumers is relatively high—that many thousands of farmers are unable to make more than a bare living, and many thousands of others have actually been driven poverty-stricken from their farms. An instance is supplied by Hon. Chauncey M. Depew, who in a speech in Brooklyn on April 29th last, said he recently complained of the quality of eggs supplied him at sixty cents a dozen. He was told he could get cheaper eggs at seventy cents a dozen. Inquiring into the prices a little deeper, he found that the farmer got twenty cents a dozen for these very eggs; the great egg trusts got the other fifty cents. The principle holds true of everything that the American farmer produces.

Conditions East of Mississippi

Do the Canadian farmers imagine that they can invade the markets of the United States, and succeed where so many American farmers fail? If so, let them make a survey of farming conditions east of the Mississippi in the United States. If there were any virtue in this cry of free access to a market of ninety millions of people, or if the United States had even begun to have reached its limit of production, surely these farmers would at least have begun to feel the benefit of it. Exactly the reverse is the case.

The United States census reports of the 20-year period from 1880 to 1900 show that in that time no fewer than 15,344 farms in New England went out of existence; that there were 17,000 less farmers in these States at the end of the period than at the beginning, and that some 5,000,000 acres of land that were in cultivation in 1880 went out of tillage and cultivation.

Deserted Farms in New England

And, thanks to the trusts, the profits of the farmers in the great markets now to be placed open to the people of Canada are so small that the decline of farming in New England is still progressing, despite free access to the market of ninety millions of people. Last year—the year of their census—there were in New England 187,418 farms, which is 2.3 less per cent. than the number at the census of 1900. The total acreage of these farms in 1910 was 19,674,000 acres, and in the acreage there had been, in the last ten years, a decrease of 4.3 per cent. Of this total acreage not quite one-half—or, to be exact, 7,242,000 acres—was improved land.

And here, too, there had been a decrease, and a very substantial one, for it amounted to almost 11 per cent. This is where the effect of abandoning appears, the land of these abandoned farms having passed out of cultivation and ceased to be a factor in the agricultural production of the New England States.

What a Boston Authority Says

Dealing with these figures, a most reliable Boston publication, whose columns are exclusively devoted to financial and commercial news, and the discussion of economic questions, says:—

“The farms abandoned in New England in the past decade aggregate 875,000 acres out of 20,549,000 held as farm land ten years ago, a loss of 4.3 per cent. In Massachusetts the abandoned farms represent 277,000 acres out of 3,147,000, or a nine per cent. loss.

“Considering only the improved acreage, the decline is still greater. The owners or tenants evidently gave up hope the past ten years on 11 per cent. of cultivated ground in all New England and in Massachusetts on 10 per cent. The burden of the loss fell chiefly on the traditional home of the abandoned farm—New Hampshire and Vermont; the former losing 14 per cent. of its tillage, and the latter 23 per cent.”

Lands That Are Not Worked Out

These abandoned farms are not newly-cleared land which experiment has shown to be unprofitable for agriculture, but farms that once were flourishing. They are in territory at least as favorably situated as Ontario or any of the Eastern provinces, and yet the value of the produce marketed from them is so low that hundreds of farms throughout this great territory can be had for less than the worth of the buildings upon them. This is not a random statement, but a statement made by the Department of Agriculture at Washington in a pamphlet published only in May, 1910, on “Agricultural Conditions in Southern New York.”

The familiar argument is, of course, that the farming country east of the Mississippi is becoming worked out; that it is bad farming which has brought about the ruin of so many thousands of farmers, and the great decline in Eastern farm values generally. The pamphlet just referred to shows that the farmers have been putting up a heroic struggle only to find themselves beaten at every turn. They have failed successively in wheat growing, barley growing, sheep raising, dairy farming, cattle raising, fruit growing and even in horse raising.

The vast areas of abandoned lands in New England and of farms upon which the farmers are struggling along in a poverty-stricken condition, are not farms that are worked out. The pamphlet referred to declares that on these lands “a small amount of capital will go a long way. These lands are not infertile, and they respond very quickly to good management.”

Where Canadian Farmer Would Enter

What, then, is the matter? The trouble is that this market into which the Canadian farmer is to be invited to try his luck, is in no need of Canadian produce. The trouble is that the United States, with its great range of territory and its climate, produces a vast surplus of all kinds of agricultural products, and these products are manipulated by the food-distributing trusts to the disadvantage of many of the producers. Go up and down this country in which the New England farmers ought to find a profitable market, and what do you find? You find the cold storage plants of the Chicago packing houses, and of the fruit and dairy trusts, taking the toll that the farmers ought to get from the breakfast and dinner tables of the great army of consumers.

Concrete Instances

Here are some of the prices of farms actually on offer at this moment in the New England States: In the town (or, as we call it, the township) of Bethel, Windsor County, Vermont, a farm of 45 acres, \$700; another of 90 acres, \$1,300; another of 360 acres, \$2,600. In the Township of Brattleboro, Vt., 190 acres, \$1,000; 100 acres, \$800; at Chester Depot, Rutland County, 195 acres, \$2,000; another of 280 acres for \$2,500; another of 250 acres for \$1,600; another of 225 acres for \$1,300; another of 130 acres for \$2,000.

In New Hampshire, in the Township of Tilton, is a farm of 500 acres for \$4,400; 150 acres for \$2,900; in Peterborough, N.H., 175 acres for \$2,900; and so one might go on. These prices are not exceptional. There are many hundreds of farms at such prices—farms on which there are good buildings, and on which, in some cases, even stock and implements are thrown in gratis. Moreover, these are not the cash prices; in all the instances quoted a small cash price and the rest on easy terms will suffice.

Even at such prices purchasers cannot be found, and farm after farm is abandoned. These decaying farms are not mean places. With rare exceptions they are the remains of spacious and once comfortable and even handsome country homes. They tell of a time when the farmers were prosperous, and they give silent and yet impressive warning to the farmers of Canada that it would be better for them to enjoy the good things they have now than to fly to evil that they know not of.

Our Lands Would Decrease in Value

It is certain that free trade in agricultural products will bring prices to a common level, and as farms are only valuable according to produce marketed from thence, the tendency for farms in Ontario and the East generally would be to drop to the value of the farms in the Eastern States.

United States a Big Exporter

Now let us see what the United States has to offer Canadian farmers in other directions. We are told that the United States will soon be unable to raise all the wheat that it requires. At present, with a population of 90 millions of people, the States are producing enough wheat for 120 millions. In 1907 the United States exported 76 million bushels of wheat against Canada's 26 millions. In other words, on an average in the last three years, the United States has exported exactly three times as much wheat as Canada. Where is the demand for Canadian wheat, except as a pawn in the game of the manipulators of the Chicago wheat pit; or as raw material for Americans who would do our milling and exporting for us?

Then take flour. In 1907, the United States exported 16 million barrels and Canada one million; in 1908, 14 million against Canada's two millions; in 1909, 11 millions against Canada's two millions. This shows that on an average the United States has in the past three years exported ten times as much flour as Canada.

Less Than One-half United States Cultivated

Where is the threatened exhaustion of the wheat supply that is to afford Canada such an opportunity? The official agricultural statistics of the United States show that of all the farm lands of our neighbors less than one-half is cultivated, the other half is in reserve. Thus, the United States can double its wheat production by simply doubling the wheat area. With the economic methods of farming practised in Europe, the United States, which has a superior climate and superior soil, could raise its production of wheat from an average of some 12 bushels to the acre to 30 bushels, and thus quadruple its supply. In fact, students of economics declare that it is capable of raising enough for 900 millions of people—and its population is 90 millions.

What has been said of wheat applies with equal force to meat and to dairy and fruit products.

Let Canada Develop Home Market

Where, then, is the attraction of the American market for the Canadian farmer? America is the greatest competitor in agricultural products that Canada has—her keenest and most jealous rival. Not in America, but in the overseas markets which he himself has won, and in the markets of Canada's own industrial population, growing so rapidly under the tariff which is building up so many large industries in this country, lie the hopes of the Canadian farmer.